



Devon Economic Partnership

**Held on Thursday 10th December 2009, 10am
Ringswell Conference Centre, Exeter**

Present:

Name	Organisation
Tim Jones (Chair)	Devon and Cornwall Business Council
Andrew Ashley	Enterprise Plymouth
Andrew Lightfoot	DEP Executive Officer
Daniel Bailyes	DEP Project Assistant
David Incoll	Devon District Councils
Derek Phillips	Exeter Chamber of Commerce and EHOD Tourism Partnership
Ellen Vernon	North Devon Council
Ian Morris	Government Office South West
Janet Sinclair	Job Centre Plus
Karime Hassan	East Devon District Council
Leanne Crawford	Devon Rural Network
Les Roper	South West Regional Development Agency
Liz Abell	Devon Renaissance
Paul Sadler	Environment Agency
Paul Thomas	Devon County Council
Peter Harding	Community Council of Devon
Peter Stacey	Business Link
Rob Hetherington	Devon County Council
Steve Pitcher	North Devon +
Tony Skeel	Learning and Skills Council

Apologies:

Name	Organisation
Andrew Southall	South West Regional Development Agency
Bill Hitchins	South Hams District Council
David Parlby	Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
Graeme Bell	Devon County Council
Ian McGregor	EDF Energy
Jeremy Filmer-Bennett	Devon and Cornwall Business Council
John Bunting	Exeter CVS
Julian Crow	First Group
Karen Hooper	Job Centre Plus
Malcolm Sherry	South West Chambers of Commerce
Rupert Owen	Plymouth City Council
Sally Kittle	Job Centre Plus
Stewart Horne	West Devon Business Information Point
Terry Murch	Midas
Vanessa Saunders	Torrige District Council
Will Mumford	Devon County Council

1. Welcome / Introductions

Tim welcomed the group and introductions were made around the table.

2. Proposed New Format for a Devon-wide Economic Partnership

Andrew Lightfoot opened the discussion by reflecting on the purpose of the partnership by making a distinction between decision making and decision taking. Partners take decisions and the partnership helps that decision making. The role of the partnership is to broker dialogue from which decisions are taken with outputs arising from the work of partners.

As an example of effective partnership work Andrew referred to the Devon and Cornwall Network of Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs). On its own, a single ESB would struggle to attain Section 4 powers. However, by coming together at a strategic level they stand a much greater chance of influencing government. Partnerships and Networks provide the means by which to achieve with fewer resources. In the current economic climate it is important that people do not retreat into their shells and end all dialogue.

The value of the partnership was expressed by a number of those present. Paul argued that connections were here to be made and Ellen, similarly, suggested that the DEP would become even more useful as a forum because of DCC's attitude towards partnerships. Derek agreed and Tim brought to the attention of the meeting that over 90% of high street traders in Plymouth voted to continue the partnership behind the Business Improvement District (BID) initiative from Plymouth City Centre. For the same reason, Sara Vincent, as head of a large pharmaceutical firm, sits on the North Devon + board.

Karime pointed out, however, that although it was good to discuss and to liaise, decisions would only be of any value if they were followed up. If nothing were to come back from them then the partnership would be ineffective. Echoing his words, Steve said that the level of engagement should not be evaluated by a willingness of key players to turn up, but their willingness to engage.

On the issue of engagement Andrew Lightfoot raised the need to talk to both Plymouth and Torbay as neither were present for the meeting. Tim reported that there is an absolute willingness to engage with the DEP from Plymouth, but was not so sure about Torbay. Although the Mayor of Torbay was keen on this commitment, he would need to get feedback from Jeremy Filmer-Bennet.

In the light of these comments David suggested that Andrew Lightfoot / Tim write a letter to Cllr Will Mumford expressing the importance of the partnership and the need to take it forwards.

Action (Andrew Lightfoot / Tim): To write a letter to Cllr Will Mumford reflecting the importance of the partnership and the need to move it forward.

David also argued that a clear route map for going forward would also need to be produced.

Action (Executive Group): To look at producing a clear route map for partners.

Finally, it was suggested that the credit for the work of the DEP was not being publicised enough in public. Both DCC and the RDA invest in the partnership, and so success needs to be recognised in the wider community.

Action (Tim): To look into the communication necessary to publicise success and credit to those to whom it is due.

3. Buy with Confidence Scheme: Paul Thomas, Head of Trading Standards, DCC

Trading Standards is being re-invented as 'business's best friend', as supporting the local economy is one of the top priorities for this ten year period. At the moment, Trading Standards tends to be associated with regulation rather than with advice and support.

Trading Standards is moving to EEC (Environment, Economy and Culture Directorate at Devon County Council). This will tie in with the economic aspects of the work, which will work better

corporately. After all, 80% of SME's come into contact with Local Authorities through 'regulatory' services.

Businesses are approved by Trading Standards through the 'Buy with Confidence' scheme in order to protect customers and promoting approved businesses. There are now 30 authorities running the scheme, predominately in the south. Devon has 300 members, receiving 400 feedback forms p.a. However, currently, they are not yet involved in Plymouth or Torbay.

A charge was introduced to the scheme, before it became free again.

The website is a bit amateurish and there is no dedicated budget.

Now an inter-regional management scheme, with promotion etc. which is building a critical mass.

Links to other websites? Tie in with other websites? Tie in with other initiatives? Cascade to businesses through Business Link. Talking with M&S and Which? – members on Which website.

Paul gave a demonstration of the website address to the group. On the 'TS Connect' website there is information for both customers and businesses, which can be accessed through the Devon County Council website.

Devon Trading Standards is relatively low cost and high effectiveness. Work is intelligence orientated, rather than relying on random inspections: now clear trends due to recession.

Buy local campaign launched on Monday for the Exeter area – 150 members. No link with Buy with Confidence. Timescale to approve depends on nature of businesses.

4. Devon Renaissance Business Survey: some key messages, Liz Abell, Devon Renaissance

The business survey covered seven rural districts and the sample was large enough to be statistically reliable. Rob pointed out that the survey was conducted in the period when unemployment in Devon rose massively.

Full copies of the report could be found on the data sticks that were handed out to all present. The report can also be downloaded from www.ruraldevon.org

A brief overview of the presentation, which focused on just 3 of the themes in the survey, is provided below:

Innovation

- 72% of those surveyed had identified further business opportunities. Construction fared badly (possible due to the economic climate at the time) while manufacturing and wholesale / retail did well.
- Lack of internal capacity and finance were identified as the two greatest barriers to innovation. Loans and overdrafts were harder to acquire from the banks. Significantly, female led businesses were hit disproportionately badly.
- Marketing was identified as the biggest difficulty in delivering new products / services.
- What could the partnership do about these issues? Making finance available? Sales / marketing support? Specialist skills training? Businesses were keen on collaborative working opportunities, but would like someone to oversee it. Businesses would also respond favourably to business mentoring.

ICT Usage

- Online trading statistics were low, and a high number of businesses, over 11%, do not use ICT at all.

- Insufficient time and a lack of technical knowledge were put forward as reasons for not fully exploiting ICT.
- What could the partnership do about these issues? Liz reported strong business appetite for both improved broadband access and ICT skills training.

Business Constraints

- Businesses felt constrained by both the size and quality of premises, and 20% considered road access an issue
- What can be done? Findings to be incorporated into the strategies and plans for workspace provision.

5. Local Economic Assessment: the Act and the Devon timeline: Rob Hetherington, DCC

The Local Economic Assessment Duty, since the last update, has become an Act of Parliament, and will become a formal duty from 1 April 2010 with the first economic assessment to be completed by December 2010. While responsibility for delivery is with DCC, the economic assessment covers the whole of Devon and therefore needs to be completed in partnership. One-to-one meetings have taken place with statutory consultees, and these are now being followed up with conversations with non-statutory consultees, such as Dartmoor National Park, to gain a broad perspective on issues. The formal consultation report will be made available on the DCC website.

Rob also updated the group on the County Council's new Economic and Spatial Planning Board and Sounding Board: there is a possibility that the DEP might be asked to arrange the latter twice a year. Liaising regionally and with neighbours.

Andrew Lightfoot brought to our attention other activities currently taking place. Not only work on the Regional Skills Strategy, but also, by April, a Work and Skills Plan for Devon and Torbay on the back of the Future Jobs Fund.

6. Devon Economic Strategy progress reports:

A. Business Infrastructure

Karime reported that the Devon Employment and Space Strategy (DESS) had been approved. Tim thanked Karime for the progress that had been made, and suggested to Karime that work on employment space needs to be cross referenced with the data provided by Liz in her presentation.

Action (Karime): To liaise with Liz on employment space in rural areas.

The next meeting of the Infrastructure Group will be on the 14th January with a focus on employment space and ICT.

B. Worklessness / Economic Inclusion

Janet reported that the focus is now moving from recession to recovery. The rate of unemployment has decreased in the last six months, though there has been an increase in long-term unemployment month by month. There is much activity to tackle the increase in youth unemployment, such as the government's 'Young Person Guarantee' initiative, part of the Future Jobs Fund. Andrew reported that 338 jobs had been approved for Devon as part of this.

Janet also brought to our attention that learning disabilities was on the agenda, and self employment was being looked at, with support, as a route into work for vulnerable groups.

In the discussion that followed, Steve made the point that the unemployment rate was not the most accurate measure of the Devon economy. Rather, income level would be. Steve was

concerned that individuals were taking work below their skills level, with the associated loss of income. This was not being captured enough in representation of Devon's economic issues.

C. Priority Communities

Andrew Lightfoot reported that the Devon School for Social Entrepreneurs has successfully recruited twenty students, and is being formally launched on 12 January by the Minister for the Third Sector.

D. Skills

Tony reported briefly the changes that were being introduced in measuring the impact of qualifications as a result of the new Skills White Paper. No longer would measurement be based solely by the numbers attaining good grades, but by the wider economic impact. This will help to fine tune where innovation in skills leads to improved productivity.

E. Business Support

Peter brought to the meeting a number of points in his progress summary:

- Currently on target with key performance indicators and more businesses are accessing support. Business clinics are also doing well.
- There are two forums in both Plymouth and Exeter mapping support for business start-ups.
- Working with a number of partners on the 50+ agenda. There will be a 50+ enterprise workshop on 25th January in Plymouth Guildhall.
- Peter has also just produced second quarter figures to analyse and feed into the Devon Renaissance survey.

Action (Peter): Feed in figures to the Devon Renaissance Survey.

F. 'Greenest County'

The RDPE is funding a range of activity and supports four Local Action Groups (LAGs). However, there is concern that progress is slower than would have liked on some of these projects, and that the bureaucracy is taking a disproportionate amount of the funding – up to 34%. However, more applications now are being approved.

Leanne reported that the farming and food board had signed off a revised farming lobby pack. Currently she is also looking to form a publicity group on TB.

Tim argued that there is a big appetite at the moment for green issues. Much more needs to be done within households and businesses (Paul), but Cranbrook will be zero carbon – which will be an enormous challenge (Karime).

Andrew Lightfoot also reported that the Comprehensive Area Agreement was recently released and was very positive about Devon and the work on the economy. Rob thanked the group for its contribution in feeding into the discussion on priorities.

Action (DEP Executive): To look into the balance of these priorities.

7. Any other matters arising from notes of the last meeting on 8th October and working group notes

Nothing arising

8. News round-up from members

Ellen:

- Individual manufacturers are beginning to recruit again;

- A ferry link is due to be operational from Easter between Ilfracombe and Swansea;
- Waiting for the formal announcement of the contractor for the Atlantic Array.

Peter:

- The revaluation of business premises is causing plenty of concern, with huge increases in some areas.

David:

- The Business Rate petition has been received by 10 Downing Street.

Andrew Ashley:

- There is a focus on Further Education and Higher Education students, raising awareness of enterprise;
- Just heard that the Olympic committee of Ghana will be basing their athletes in the Plymouth area in order to acclimatise.
- The number of NEETs is actually reducing, with a number of initiatives taking place. Some big employers are also increasing recruitment e.g. Princess yachts.

9. Confirm date of next meeting: 17th February, 10am

Confirmed, and the meeting would be held in Mid-Devon.